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SBC Exec. Comm. drops 10% CP goal

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Pending approval by the full Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC), two of nine recommendations to strengthen the Cooperative Program (CP) will be revised when they are presented to messengers at the SBC annual meeting next month, according to a May 26 announcement by the EC president and officers.

The announcement followed a vote by teleconference May 25.

One of the recommendations now will encourage churches to increase their giving through the Cooperative Program but no longer will specify a 10% goal for supporting the missions and ministries of state Baptist conventions and the SBC. Another now will encourage the election of leaders whose churches "are committed to increasing systematically and enthusiastically the percentage of undesignated receipts given through the Cooperative Program," again without mention of a 10% target.

"These recommendations never were intended to create controversy," the May

26 statement reads. "Messengers will have a number of decisions to make about a host of issues. We hope the revised recommendations will make it possible for messengers to wholeheartedly embrace our initiative to increase support for the Cooperative Program."

Morris H. Chapman, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, said the changes were needed because the mention of a goal was being misperceived as a mandate or litmus test, instead of the intended spirit of the report to encourage greater support of SBC causes through the Cooperative Program.

"The mention of a specific percentage in the recommendations has generated so much discussion from a variety of perspectives that we felt a revision would allow all Southern Baptists, from churches large and small, to enthusiastically approve the report, including the nine recommendations," Chapman told Baptist Press. "The officers of the Executive Committee and I feel we are recommending a revision that will make the acceptance of the report universal among Southern Baptists while remaining a challenge to every church and every pastor.

"The members of both the Executive Committee and the [Ad Hoc] CP Committee strongly believe in the autonomy of the local church and fully understand that only a local church can decide what portion of their tithes and offerings will be given through the Cooperative Program," he added. "The language of the recommendations keyed on the word, 'encourage.' Nevertheless, if we can dispel misunderstandings about the report, we are obligated for the sake of God's Kingdom and the convention to do so."

A number of reports have been issued in recent years, drawing attention to the dwindling number of tithees among Southern Baptists and the continuing decrease in giving through the Cooperative Program as a percentage of undesignated receipts. Citing data from a report by Empty Tomb, Inc., a Christian research and service organization, the fourth report of the SBC Funding Study Committee, issued in March 2006, noted that the average church member in America gave just 2.6% of income to their church.

In his statement to BP, Chapman noted, "In 1984, the average percentage of undesignated receipts Southern Baptist churches gave through the

Cooperative Program was 10.6%. In 2005, the last year of record, the average percentage Southern Baptist churches gave through the Cooperative Program was 6.66%."

Cooperative Program support has emerged as a hot button issue in the SBC presidential election.

Media coverage of SBC presidential candidate Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Church in Springfield, Ark., has highlighted the percentage of his church's giving through CP, that includes both state and national causes: .27% (\$32,000) of undesignated receipts of \$11,952,137.

The other candidate for SBC president is Frank Page, pastor of First Church in Taylors, S.C. In 2005, the Taylors congregation gave \$534,683, or 12.4%, through the Cooperative Program from total undesignated receipts of \$4,297,861.

The recommendations came to the Executive Committee after approval by state executive directors who met in February in Canada. The report is the result of almost three years of work by the Ad Hoc CP Committee, chaired by Anthony L. Jordan, executive director-treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

Jordan, in a statement to Baptist Press, expressed disappointment with the proposed revisions but also confirmed the leadership role of the SBC EC president and officers in making the decision.

"The report's recommendations were made in an effort to challenge Southern Baptists to reach the world with the Gospel in a manner consistent with our history as a denomination," Jordan said. "Calling for the election of officers who demonstrate in word and deed a commitment to cooperative missions giving and recommending that our churches give at least 10% of undesignated receipts through the Cooperative Program were never intended to be law."

"The revisions made by the Executive Committee do not change the reality that we can do more together than we can alone. The Cooperative Program is our chosen way of mission support. It deserves our best."

Chapman noted the monumental task of spreading the Gospel and the cooperation needed among Southern Baptists to do their part.

"Convention leaders can encourage, but only the churches can decide how much to invest in Southern Baptist missions and how far to go with the Gospel."

"At this juncture of Southern Baptist history," he emphasized, "we face one critical question, 'Can we do any less than to seize the moment to stand side by side, working together cooperatively, for the sake of sending multitudes of Gospel preachers and missionaries to the ends of the earth?'"

The SBC annual meeting will be held in Greensboro, N.C., June 13-14, with the Executive Committee meeting the day before.

Welch announces retirement

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (BP) — Bobby Welch, pastor of First Church in Daytona Beach and the president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), told church leaders he will retire Aug. 27 after 32 years as the church's senior pastor.

A letter from Welch to members of the church was sent May 25 explaining that he will "officially" announce his retirement plans in the May 28 morning worship services. A copy of the letter was made available May 26 to the Florida Baptist Witness.

"The reason I have written you now is because I want you to hear from me before the press and newspapers begin to speculate on the matter. With the Southern Baptist Convention upon us, undoubtedly that would happen," Welch wrote, noting that he would have preferred a "more personal" communication.

Welch told his congregation that he met with the church's staff and leadership May 22 to inform them of his retirement plans.

"I had actually planned to wait a few weeks before making this official but Maudellen and I wanted you to hear this good news from us, personally," he wrote. He plans to explain his retirement plans May 28 and "add some of the details" the following Sunday, June 4, when he intends to preach a message on "Your Legacy of Leadership."



Welch

Welch continued, "I've always prayed God would make it clear to me when this time had come. He surely has and that period in our lives is now. It is the perfect opportunity for the church and us, and I could not imagine a better time."

Welch said he and his wife, Maudellen, will remain in the church after retirement, including maintaining an office as he becomes pastor emeritus, and will offer assistance to David Cox, Welch's co-pastor since 2003 who will become senior pastor.

"My commitment will be to always be far enough away from the church not to cause harm and close enough to Dr. Cox to be a help," he added.

"Needless to say, these 32 years have been unspeakably happy, blessed and fulfilling. You are our dearest, valued and most trusted friends in all the world. We are thrilled beyond words that it appears the Lord will allow us to continue in ministry with Pastor David and you until we die. We want this retirement to be a happy, exciting and celebrative time in the church's life and ours. See you Sunday."

Welch signed off, "With You in His Certain Victory!!!"

A graduate of New Orleans Seminary and a decorated Vietnam combat veteran, Welch is co-founder of the FAITH Sunday School evangelism strategy and the author of *You, The Warrior Leader*.



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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See you in Greensboro

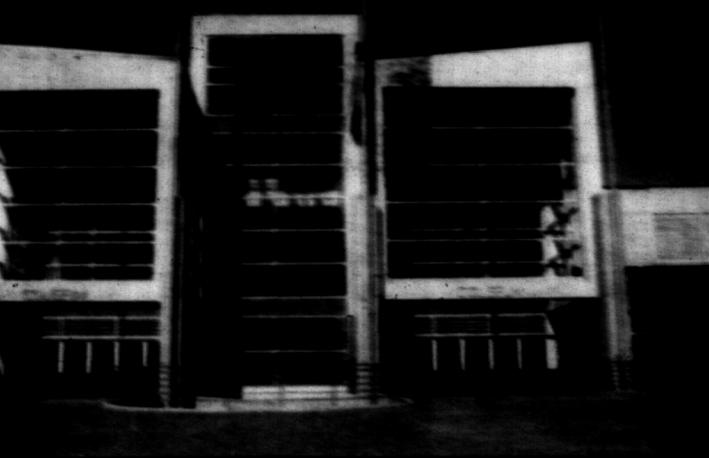
Anyone who thinks politics in Washington D.C. can get rough should attend an annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). While politics has been a component of our convention since the start, there's no doubt the maneuvering and choosing of sides has increased in the past 25 years as the battle for control has played out.

As we all know by now, the group that likes to be known as conservatives beat out the group that prefers to be known as moderates for the right to craft the future direction of the convention. Even though name-calling and conflict continues to this day, conservatives remain firmly in control and many of the moderates have departed for what they consider to be greener ministry pastures. So be it.

With apologies to Latin scholars, it seemed that a *pure* Southern Baptist had finally taken hold — but that is apparently about to change, with the two SBC missionary-sending agencies in concurrent uproots and a fledgling group of young pastors ready to mount a challenge to what they see as the iron-fisted tactics of the grayheads now in charge.

Top that off with a presidential candidate whose church contributes considerably less than a penny on the dollar to the Cooperative Program and baptizes children in a fake siren-and-lights fire engine while confetti is blasted from cannons, and the June 13-14 SBC annual meeting in Greensboro, N.C., should be a gathering to remember for a long time.

Of course, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) in suburban Atlanta is



Greensboro Coliseum

without a president after Bob Record resigned over a Georgia Baptist Index newspaper article and subsequent trustee investigation that revealed troubling questions about his leadership and judgement. Three other top NAMB administrators have also departed since the newspaper article was published.

Over at the International Mission Board (IMB) in Richmond, a trustee disturbed by the tactics and policies of trustee leaders is threatening to reveal all and call those trustee leaders to account. A former two-term president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, Wade Burleson is no nut case; he is being touted as an SBC presidential candidate by some younger SBC pastors.

Many of those younger pastors met in Memphis earlier this year and issued a statement that was tagged the Memphis Declaration. It reads in part: "We publicly declare before all Southern Baptists that we believe the unity, mission, and witness of our denomination is seriously

threatened by the introduction of the narrowing of cooperation through theological and political agendas that corrupt the healthy and mutual friendship we enjoy as Kingdom servants."

The full text of the Memphis Declaration can be found on the Internet at www.twelve-witnesses.blogspot.com. (Click on "Read the Memphis Declaration" on the right-hand side of the page.)

Meanwhile, the SBC Executive Committee watered down a special report that called for a floor of 10% Cooperative Program giving by the churches of candidates for SBC offices. That came after Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Church in Springdale, Ar., confirmed he would be nominated

for SBC president. His church gave 27% last year to the Cooperative Program.

Floyd's church also commissioned a theme park ride designer to convert the children's ministry into Toon Town and Planet 45, a modern, \$270,000 kaleidoscope of buzzers, bells, bubbles, flashing lights, and MTV-style video images, according to a report in Christianity Today magazine. The new set includes the fire engine baptistry.

"Stained-glass windows aren't really appropriate for leading kids," said Dale Hudson, the children's minister, in the Christianity Today article.

Along with the serious worship and praise that is an integral part of every SBC annual meeting, there should be plenty of fireworks at this year's Greensboro meeting (and apparently for several years to come). Make plans to attend. Your participation in the SBC's open democratic process is needed — and, after all, this show only comes to town once a year.

to release her newest book on 6-6-06. Coulter, writer of the best-sellers *How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must)*, and *Slander: Liberal Lies About the American Right*, said the release date of her newest work, *Godless*, was her "little tribute to liberals."

It is also all about marketing.

On the serious side, a Denver Post article suggests that we should be on alert that day. Since 1970, there have been 60 terrorist attacks on June 6 but only one has been within the United States, according to the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, based in Oklahoma City. Numbers and symbols are important to many fringe groups, adds Kerry Noble, a former leader with the paramilitary group known as the Covenant.

All things considered, Christians should not fall for the hype we will hear as 6-6-06 approaches. Remember, there was a 6-6-6 in 1996, 1986, 1976, 1966, 1906, and so on. The world did not end.

Our God is not into cheap publicity stunts, and His people should not fall for them.

GUEST OPINION:



Distracted by cheap stunts

**By Carl M. White, senior pastor
Highland Church, Meridian**

June 6, 2006 is coming. Written another way, you get 6-6-06. The European way would be 06-6-6. Whichever, it comes out looking like 666 and that, you know, is the Mark of the Beast from the Revelation.

Beware, Christians! Hollywood has taken note. A remake of the really bad 1980s movie *The Omen* is scheduled for release on 6-6-06. I am certain the remake will be equally as bad. Previews have been shown in theaters for the past month. During spring break, the film's producers sent planes over crowded beaches pulling signs that read, "You have been warned!" according to Susan Carpenter writing in the Los Angeles Times. Someone dialed 911 and a fighter jet was scrambled to escort one of the planes to the ground. (I guess they were not warned!)

In addition, Carpenter reports that several musicians are taking advantage of this date for releasing new CDs. Paul Oakenfold's *A Lively Mind* and David Lee Roth's *Strummin' With the Devil* will both be released on 6-6-06. The death metal rock group

Deicide, renowned for their support of animal sacrifice, will release *The Stench of Redemption*, taking full advantage of 6-6-06 date.

There is more: the online radio station Radio Free Satan, based in Chicago, is heading to Los Angeles, where it plans to celebrate its sixth year and also ring in what it calls the "sennetennial" with Satan's Rockin' 666 Eve. Heavy metal rock legend Slayer will launch their Unholy Alliance Tour, called Preaching to the Perverted. (I can't wait to miss that!)

Other strange things are happening that day. In Holland, there has been a rash

of wedding applications for that day. Normally, the office of Registration, where you go to apply to be married by the state in Holland, has eight to 10 weddings on a given June day. As of a few weeks ago, the Registration offices across Holland reported as many as 40 applications for June 6.

One couple wanted to be married at six minutes past 6 a.m. on June 6, 2006. (I wonder if they will break a mirror and walk under a ladder during the ceremony.)

That's not all. Ann Coulter, the conservative author and talking head on the many talk TV and radio programs, plans

Trustee Burleson to battle IMB leaders' ban

ALBUQUEQUE (BP) — International Mission Board (IMB) trustee Wade Burleson of Enid, Okla., will continue to be restricted from holding committee assignments in light of a report of the board's executive committee presented May 24 by trustee chairman Thomas Hatley of Rogers, Ark.

Hatley recommended that newly elected chairman John Floyd of Memphis continue to restrict Burleson from service on any committee, encouraging Burleson "to change his position to follow a biblical model of restoration of wounded brothers and sisters in Christ."

The restriction is to be lifted immediately once Burleson publicly acknowledges that his actions during his first year of service "have seriously eroded the confidence of his fellow trustees and that he can and will work with them in a way that will instill mutual trust," Hatley said, and that he apologizes for repeatedly questioning their motives.

Hatley said Burleson had made a good start with a statement on his weblog expressing an apology that, in Burleson's words, "some trustees feel broad brushed with the allegation that they were a part of a group of people out to remove Dr. Rankin," referring to IMB President Jerry Rankin.

Hatley said the apology "would be really wonderful if that were expressed in the context of the statements themselves." He also advised Burleson to offer "a verbal apology before this board and not just on the blog site which many will not access, therefore they will not benefit from receiving that apology."

In concluding, Hatley said he had initially removed from his report concerns about Burleson breaching confidentiality until informed of posts made to the weblog regarding matters discussed in a private trustee forum only days earlier. Hatley said several trustees informed him of the new development and IMB counsel confirmed the posts by Burleson.

"Because of that and other breaches of confidentiality, I would recommend that our new chairman also use his prerogative to bar Brother Burleson from the forums and executive sessions in the coming year because of the lack of ability to restrain himself from publishing information shared in confidence," Hatley said.

Hatley quoted statements that appear on Burleson's weblog from four dates in December and January. He cited Burleson's characterization of "conservatives who love the battles of decades past" who "have fallen victim to a crusading mentality of blood thirst," with recent actions of the IMB board cited

as evidence of such charges. Burleson drew the conclusion that "conservative crusaders have yet to learn how to sheath the sword, and rather than cooperate with fellow conservatives in reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, they have gone after the head of Dr. Jerry Rankin." A further reference was made to Burleson's portrayal of trustees who disagree with him as having "forgotten how to minister in the power of the Spirit through prayer, humility and cooperation."

Hatley also questioned Burleson allowing posts from contributors to the weblog that characterized trustees as "bigoted" and having "petty self conceit." Hatley quoted a Jan. 12 statement in which Burleson said of some IMB trustees, "They might be guilty of shortsightedness, lack of wisdom, or may simply be clueless ..." A few days later, Hatley noted, Burleson blogged, "I have shown, and will continue to show, great respect for my fellow trustees."

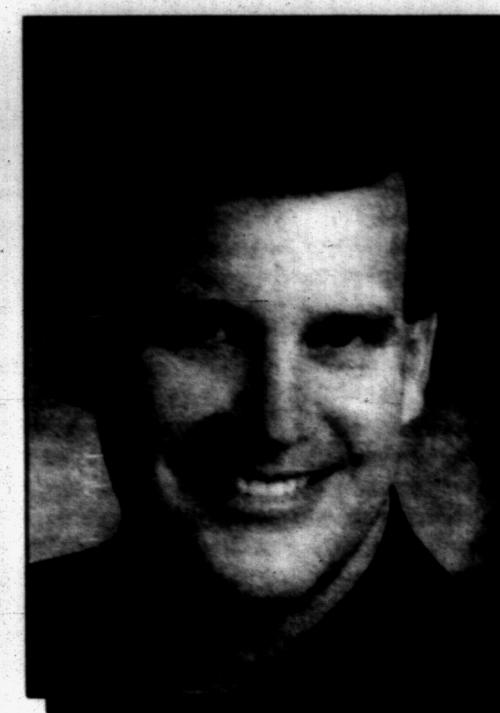
The report read by Hatley stated that Burleson "has, beginning late last year, posted and maintained on his personal blog site a running commentary on the operations of the Board that included the repeated assertion that our recently approved policy on private prayer language and guidelines on baptism were enacted not for any legitimate purpose having to do with the effectiveness of IMB global operations, but rather as a part of a concerted action on the part of un-named trustees to embarrass and undermine our president. While expressing his opinions Brother Wade was offensive and combative toward this board."

While having "no desire to restrict his opinions" nor insisting "he agree with the majority of this board on any issue," Hatley said that "when character is impugned and motives are judged that a spirit of mistrust emerges that can damage the ability of this body to work together." He indicated that while Burleson felt these matters stand reconciled, Hatley told the Oklahoma trustee that "others do not enjoy that view and remain hurt by his comments."

Hatley urged trustees to stay focused on "a lot of good things to talk about and do" instead of being "distracted by matters such as this," then he recognized IMB Executive Vice President Clyde Meador for a staff report.



Hatley



Burleson



MISSISSIPPI
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At that point, Burleson approached a microphone, stating, "Mr. Chairman, I just have a quick question for you. I appreciate the spirit in which that was given. I do not know to what you refer when you speak of breach of confidentiality. No one has come to me personally.

"I did things to make sure I did not breach confidences,"

Burleson told Hatley. "I would just request that specifics be shared since the charge has been shared in public forum. If you'd please state what it is and I will on the spot repent if there was a breach of forum."

Hatley responded, "I appreciate that and I think repentance is due, but I would not, even after revealing this, I would still not change my recommendation even with repentance because of the pattern of the breach of confidentiality demonstrated. Repentance needs to be shown by action and not just by words."

Responding to the clarification Burleson sought as to how

he violated confidential trustee deliberations, Hatley stated, "Matters that were shared only in forum, not in plenary session, about the intent of the executive committee to make a recommendation and the purpose of that was mentioned on your blog. It had not been mentioned in this session, so that would be a violation of confidentiality."

Burleson replied, "Mr. Chairman, what I would say to that is I'm not sure what you're referring to." Hatley answered, "I'm sorry, you'll have to close that microphone. I need to recognize Clyde to come and give his report. Thank you."

Looking back

First Church, Jackson, has been selected by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to host the year's final missionary appointment service and trustee meeting on December 8.

First Church, Tupelo, demolishes a pair of venerable old education buildings that survived the disastrous 1936 Tupelo tornado. A new \$1.5 million education building and sanctuary will soon occupy the property.

The Fidelis Sunday School class of First Church, Meridian, purchases a concrete block machine for Baptist-affiliated Clarke College in Newton, where a post-World War II lumber shortage has halted construction of much-needed dormitory space at the Baptist junior college.



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4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (*I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.*)

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LOSTNESS AND THE MALE PSYCHE

Men notoriously will not ask for directions. It is not that they cannot ask. It is that they will not ask. It is not that they always know where they are going. It somehow involves the fact that they are sure they know more than anybody that they would stop and ask. The result is that they drive around the planet hoping to bump into what they are looking for and find where they are supposed to be. The real issue here is not that men don't ask for directions. It is just that their brains work differently and their thought process will just not allow them to stop and ask. Most people don't understand the male psyche and the twist of the brain that is in most male human beings. So just by way of clarification, let me help you understand why men do not stop to get directions.

One, the average male believes that he is not lost as long as he has gas in his tank, so he just keeps on driving. What would be the purpose of stopping to ask someone when you can just keep on driving? The planet is not all that big and surely if you drive long



Directions

**Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board**

enough you will bump into wherever it is that you are supposed to be.

The second aspect of this strange male phenomenon is that most men believe it is better to drive around lost than to walk around found. Just a few weeks ago on the news there was an interesting incident reported in South Carolina. A man actually stopped and asked for directions. The fellow he asked pulled a gun, ordered him out of his car, stole his vehicle, and left him on foot. Now you tell me, would the guy have been better off just riding around or not? Absolutely!

Three, most men believe it is better to be lost on their own terms than to be lost following the directions of others. What if you stop and ask someone for directions and they give you the wrong

directions? Well, you were lost when you stopped to ask for directions. Now you are more lost than you were before so you would actually be better off just being half lost than someone else confusing you in your lostness. It makes sense to me.

Four, most men believe that if we don't know where we are going but we do know where we are then we are not really lost. Most women and some men who have a lack of understanding would probably think you were lost. Not so! If you know where you are even if you don't know where you are going, you are in good shape.

Five, one last influencer of this strange predicament is the thought that it is less embarrassing to ride around directionless than it is to stop and ask someone for directions who

obviously is not as smart as you are. Now just think about it. Most of the time when you stop and ask for directions the person walking along the side of the road may not be a PhD candidate. With this kind of thinking in place which is prevalent among men, you wonder how Columbus ever found America, how Byrd found the Pole, or how wars are ever fought since the two armies have to find each other.

So now we understand why Jesus spent an entire chapter in the Gospel of Luke addressing lostness. You remember: He dealt with the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son. It was not by their own initiative that they were found. All of us go the wrong way, we miss the mark, we sin, and we do not know what direction to go. Thanks be to God; He knows where we are and is not only willing to give us directions, but *He comes looking for us!* Luke 19:10 is glorious — "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Oh, what a blessing it is to be found.

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Adopt An Annuitant Sunday set for June 25



The Edwardses

DALLAS (BP) — "Sacrifice was at the center of our ministry," Noel Edwards said. He and his wife Sue dedicated their lives to the Gospel ministry. Noel started preaching when he was 16, spending 55 years in Southern Baptist ministry before retiring.

Today, the Adopt An Annuitant program of GuideStone Financial Resources (former the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) is helping provide monthly support — and a gift of dignity — to the Edwardses and nearly 2,500 other retired ministers and widows.

Southern Baptist churches across the nation will participate in Adopt-An Annuitant Sunday on June 25, a day for remembering the thousands of aged ministers and their widows who unselfishly devoted their lives to the God's call but now are facing their retirement years without the financial resources to meet their basic daily needs.

"These pastors often served smaller, rural churches and missions that provided only a modest salary and little, if any, contributions toward a retirement account," said John Ambra, director of development for GuideStone's Adopt An Annuitant ministry. "Now in retirement, many struggle to afford the basic necessities of life such as food, housing, prescription drugs and medical care."

That is the story of Noel and Sue Edwards. Serving small Southern Baptist churches while raising a family meant both Noel and Sue worked second jobs and often had a difficult time making ends meet, but God kept sending people into their lives to help, including a local grocer

who provided food when they were down to their last two dollars.

The Edwardses never were able to save much toward their later years — a small salary meant little was left for retirement planning. "We have gone to churches because we knew the Lord was in it even when we didn't know what the salary would be," Noel said.

As Sue put it, "We found out in our ministry that as we ministered to people, and then we had needs, they ministered to us."

O.S. Hawkins, president of GuideStone, said the Southern Baptist entity was founded on the idea of "serving those who gave sacrificially to spread the Word of God. Even though GuideStone has become a leading denominational benefits organization, the heart of our ministry is still providing support to these dear folks who have given of themselves sacrificially in the service of our Lord."

Because of the generosity of Southern Baptists, nearly 2,500 individuals or couples like Noel and Sue Edwards are being helped monthly. Gifts to the Adopt An Annuitant ministry help retired ministers and their widows maintain their dignity through providing assistance to pay for food, utilities and medical care.

Recipients of Adopt An Annuitant funds must meet guidelines for income, assets and years of Southern Baptist service. Qualified recipients may be eligible for \$200 per month for an individual or \$265 per month for a couple.

Under GuideStone's financial assistance guidelines, more than \$6 million will be paid out annually in assistance to retirees whose income is insufficient to meet their needs. Nearly \$1.4 million will come from the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program.

However, the majority of the funding comes from the direct gifts of individuals, groups and churches to the Adopt An Annuitant ministry. Every cent received by the program goes to someone in need. No administrative expenses are paid from the gifts made to the Adopt An Annuitant program.

Free bulletin inserts are available from GuideStone along with "A Gift of Dignity" video to use on June 25 in worship services, Sunday School departments or mission-oriented organizations. Orders can be made online at www.GuideStone.org or by calling 1-888-98-GUIDE (1-888-984-8433).

"Words just don't express how much we appreciate the people who help us through the Adopt An Annuitant program," Noel Edwards said. "It's a life saver for us."

For additional information, visit www.GuideStone.org.

JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Bible Drillers, Oakland Church, Walnut



2. Senior Graduates, Fredonia Church, New Albany

1. Kayrah Wright (center) and Jackie Gray (right) of **Oakland Church, Walnut**, participated in Bible Drill for the first time this year and advanced to the state competition. Congratulating them is Bible Drill teacher Elizabeth Reed.

2. **Fredonia Church, New Albany**, recognized its six graduating high school seniors on May 21. Pictured are (from left) Scarlett Wray, Alex Rowland, Landon Kidd (Ingomar High School valedictorian), Kristalyn Holcomb, Adam Gaines, and Rob Browning (IHS salutatorian).

3. **Youth of Concord Church, Benton - Tippah Association**, held a car wash and viewing of The Passion of the Christ movie to raise money to assist in Hurricane Katrina recovery along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Debbie Kennedy is youth missions leader.

4. **Oakhurst Church, Clarksdale**, recently held a Royal Ambassadors (RA) and Girls in Action (GA) Pinewood Derby. Pictured are participants.



3. Youth Fundraiser, Concord Church, Benton-Tippah Association



4. RAs and GAs Pinewood Derby, Oakhurst Church, Clarksdale

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"Normal" people are broke.

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ROMANS 12:2

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



5. Bible Drillers, Ackerman Church, Ackerman



6. Burns honored, Immanuel Church, Olive Branch

5. Ackerman Church, Ackerman, recognizes its Bible drillers. Front row, Haley Lucas, Leanna Carter, Abby Wood, Dayna Presley, Kaitlin and Gavin Busby; back row, Carolyn Lindley, leader, Ellen and Claire Graves, and Ginny Lucas, leader.

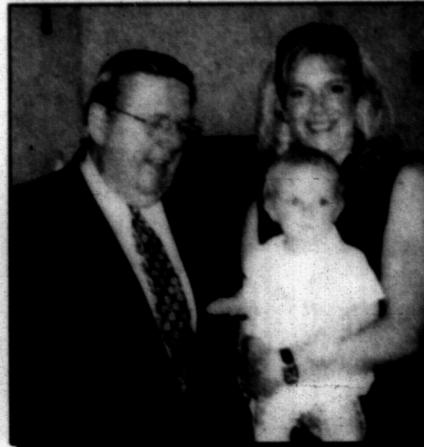
6. Jennifer Burns (center) was presented a special Bible by Stan May (right), the pastor of her home church, Immanuel Church, Olive Branch, in honor of her eight distinguished years of Bible Drill competition. Also congratulating Burns was her Bible Drill coach for all eight years, Becky Smith.

7. Philadelphia Church, Etta, collected 158 pounds of pennies for the Memorial to the Missing. Elizabeth Johnson is pictured placing her pennies into a five-gallon water bottle that was completely filled.

8. Hope Church, Philadelphia, recently licensed Cassidy Crenshaw to the youth and music ministry. Shown are pastor Dennis Duvall and Crenshaw.



7. Penny Collection, Philadelphia Church, Etta



9. Baby Dedication, Pine Forest Church, Collinsville



8. Crenshaw Ordained, Hope Church, Philadelphia



10. Adult Bible Drillers, First Church, Greenwood

9. Pine Forest Church, Collinsville, held a baby dedication Apr. 23. Shown are pastor Lyn Nations, Major Chris (presently serving in Iraq) and Shani Hay and baby Luke; Chris and Sharon Keene and baby Addie; Cary and April Luke and baby Cooper; Tim and Tracy Wheat and baby Olivia.

11. First Church, Greenwood, recognizes its children bible drillers. Front row, left to right: Sara Grace Hemphill, Molly Cannon, Ann Claire Dunn, Carrie Webster, and Alex Gillespie. Second row: drill leader — Debra Miller, Katie Anderton, Avery Alderman; Barrett Jonhson, Kristen Stephens, Joseph Tillman. Back row: Ty Craig, Liz Grantham, Heather Pate, Sarah Johnson, and Cooper Anderton.

12. Bigbee Church, Amory, contributed 65,342 pennies for the Memorial to the Missing in Jackson, and has plans to raise additional pennies for the memorial to the 50 million babies missing since Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in 1973.

13. Paul Church, Scobey, is planning their 100th anniversary celebration and homecoming in August. A specific date has not been set. The church is seeking any type of church-related history, pictures, news articles, etc. for the celebration. Contact Wayne Gore at (662) 647-2573, or Gayle May at (662) 647-5958.



11. Children Bible Drillers, First Church, Greenwood

JUST FOR THE RECORD



14. King licensed as youth minister, Hebron Church, Bentonia



20. Bible Buddies and Drillers, Hebron Church, Bentonia

14. **Hebron Church, Bentonia,** recently licensed Robbie King to the ministry. Shown are King and pastor Luke Edwards presenting the license.

15. **Broadmoor Church, Madison,** will host a Pastors' Wives and Women in Ministry Luncheon on June 8 at 11:30 a.m. Vicki Weaver, speaker; Bridget Taylor, music. Introduction to upcoming Christmas in July "I Choose Joy" women's conference. Cost: \$10 per person; reservation deadline is June 2. R.S.V.P.

to Hallie Duckworth at director@thechristmasvillage.org or (601) 853-7687.

16. **Harrisville Church, Harrisville,** will conduct Vacation Bible School on June 5-9 from 8:30 a.m.-11:50 a.m., for three-year-olds through sixth grade.

17. **Liberty Church, Liberty,** will conduct Artic Edge Adventure Vacation Bible School on June 12-16 from 8:30 a.m.-noon, for three-year-olds through sixth grade. Friday is Family Day with hot dog lunch at 11:30 a.m.

18. **Mt. Carmel Church, Edinburg,** will conduct Artic Edge Adventure Vacation Bible School on June 19-23, from 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m. Preregistration is June 10 from 10 a.m.-noon; lunch provided. Family Night, June 25 at 6 p.m.

19. **Sand Hill Church, Ellisville,** surpassed its \$1,500 goal for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions. A total of \$1,758 was given by church members.

20. **Hebron Church, Bentonia,** recognizes its Bible drill participants.

21. **Bala Chitto Church, Pike Association,** recently licensed Larry Whitehead to the ministry after preaching his first sermon. Dave Hartson, pastor.

22. **Rocky Point Church, Carthage,** will conduct Artic Edge Adventure Vacation Bible School on June 5-9 from 9 a.m.-noon. Betty Jenkins, director. Marshall Lum, pastor.



21. Whitehead Licensed, Bala Chitto Church, Pike Assoc.

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Marriage amendment in danger of failing

WASHINGTON (BP) — A majority of the U.S. Senate supports the Marriage Protection Amendment (MPA) but the measure may not receive an up-or-down vote the week of June 5, leading advocates for the proposal have indicated.

Senators are scheduled to begin consideration of the constitutional amendment on June 5, with a vote of some type expected June 6 or 7. The amendment, S.J. Res. 1, defines marriage as only between a man and a woman. The proposal is designed to protect the institution against continuing legal efforts to legalize homosexual marriage.

"It's not clear whether we'll have a direct vote or whether this will be a procedural vote when we get back [from the Memorial Day recess]," said Sen. Wayne Allard (R.-Co.), the amendment's sponsor, at a May 25 news conference in the Capitol building. "The good news is we are continuing to see growing support for the Marriage Protection Amendment."

That support amounts to "a majority in the Senate," said Matt Daniels, president of the Alliance for Marriage, at the news conference. "We have made progress since the last vote."

The last vote was a procedural one in 2004 to limit debate and actually bring the amendment to the Senate floor for up-or-down action. The effort received only 48 votes of the 60 needed to end debate, or invoke cloture, as it is known. For Senate approval, the amendment will need not only 60 votes to reach the floor, if opponents seek to block action, but 67 in an up-or-down vote (two-thirds approval).

The Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) and other backers of the amendment are urging Americans to contact their senators by June 6 to ask them to support it. They hope a massive outpouring of support for the amendment will produce the needed votes.

The ERLC also is encouraging Southern Baptist churches to consider observing



Marriage Protection Sunday June 4, and for pastors to address same-sex marriage that day and encourage church members to ask their senators to support the amendment.

Though Massachusetts is the only state to have legalized same-sex marriage, MPA supporters predict courts will continue to expand marriage to include homosexual couples unless a federal amendment is ratified to address the problem.

Supreme courts in New Jersey, New York, and Washington could legitimize "gay marriage" before the end of the year, and the decision expected out of Washington state could be especially damaging, Daniels told reporters.

The Washington Supreme Court's ruling is "expected to have a massive impact on the political landscape surrounding the debate over marriage," Daniels said. "The reason is simple. The Washington state court is not going to impose any residency requirements. So, unlike Massachusetts [which does

not permit same-sex couples from most other states to 'marry'], the Washington state decision will produce national, legal chaos."

Even if the amendment is not approved by Congress this year, "our momentum will continue to grow," Daniels said. "This is being driven by the court cases. The public pays attention to the extent that the [courts continue] to strike down marriage. The policies of this will be driven by the courts. There are about nine lawsuits pending. As they come down, public opinion will continue to awaken in our favor."

A decision in a Georgia court May 16 seemed to validate the campaign for a federal amendment. A state judge ruled Georgia's marriage amendment, which was approved by 76% of voters in 2004, violates the state constitution. The amendment prohibits both "same-sex marriage" and Vermont-style civil unions.

Ratification of an amendment to the Constitution requires passage by two-thirds of both houses of Congress and approval by three-fourths of the states. The House of Representatives achieved a majority in 2004 with a 227-186

vote but fell far short of the votes needed for passage.

At the May 25 news conference, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee, as well as Sens. George Allen (R.-Va.), and David Vitter (R.-La.), spoke in behalf of the amendment. Other backers of the proposal who spoke included multi-ethnic representatives of civil rights, evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Jewish groups.

The text of the MPA says, "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

Southern Baptists and others may contact senators by calling the Capitol switchboard, (202) 224-3121, and asking for their offices. E-mails may be sent through the website of the Religious Coalition for Marriage, www.rcm.org, or the Senate's Internet site, www.senate.gov.

For more information about the national debate over homosexual marriage, visit <http://www.bpnews.net/samesexmarriage>.

Ca. governor vows veto on 'gay history'

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will veto a bill requiring the inclusion of "gay history" in state public school textbooks if it makes it to his desk, a spokesman said on May 24.

The bill, which would mandate that textbooks include "the contributions of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to the total development of California and the United States," has passed the California Senate and currently is before the state Assembly.

"The governor believes that school curriculum should include all important historical figures, regardless of orientation," Schwarzenegger spokesman Adam Mendelsohn told The Sacramento Bee. "However, he does not support the legislature micromanaging curriculum."

Pro-family groups are urging Schwarzenegger to veto two other related bills, A.B. 606 and A.B. 1056. Assembly Bill 606 would require school districts to establish antidiscrimination policies based on "actual or perceived gender identity and sexual orientation."

Assembly Bill 1056 would spend \$250,000 to establish pilot programs in 10 schools "to promote instruction in public schools on tolerance" based in part on "sexual orientation."

Both bills have passed the Assembly and currently are before the Senate.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unsigned letters will not be printed. No multi-copy or form letters will be used.

Each correspondent must include an address and telephone number for verification. In special instances, name may be withheld at writer's request and editor's discretion.

Please include the name of cooperating Mississippi Baptist church where correspondent is a member. (Mississippi Baptists' letters will receive priority when space is limited.)

Letters must be limited to 250 words. All correspondence is subject to editing.

Correspondents should refrain from personal attacks. The opinions expressed in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

No more than one letter from any individual will be printed during a three-month period.

When in the judgement of the editor a given issue has received sufficient attention, correspondence dealing with it will no longer be published and a notice will be printed to that effect.

COLUMN INACCURATE

Editor:

In 1954 I made my profession of faith and was baptized at Pascagoula's First Baptist Church. A lifelong Baptist, I've always felt strongly about my faith.

I was shocked by inaccuracies in your recent column criticizing Senator Thad Cochran, also a Baptist, and myself for proposing the move of the CSX railroad tracks, allegedly for casino interests. I've never discussed this proposal with the gaming industry.

I think they'd prefer not moving the tracks because it would take traffic flowing in front of casinos and move it north. Suggesting our motivation is to benefit casinos insults families of more than 100 people who've lost their lives during the last 10 years along roughly 130 local CSX crossings. While the merits and impact of gaming are often debated, I'll not gamble with the lives of Mississippians.

For The Baptist Record to mimic inaccurate arguments of the liberal New York Times and Washington Post comes as a shocking disappointment. Worse, it is a violation of the journalistic code of conduct because I received no request from the Record to respond.

Surely The Baptist Record would extend Senator Cochran and me, two Baptists, a chance to explain our side of the story.

I feel very strongly about my faith and lifetime denomination choice. Nothing will shake this foundation of my life — not political intrigue, not death, not natural disasters, not even a publication of my religious denomination. My faith is resolute, but my disappointment in The Baptist Record is profound.

Trent Lott, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

Editor's note: There is no uniform "journalistic code of conduct" that journalists are required to follow, so no "violation" of a non-existent code was committed in writing the editorial. Secondly, the article in question was clearly marked as an editorial — one writer's opinion — and as such does not call for a response. Lastly, Senator Lott has been given an opportunity to respond by virtue of his letter to the editor.

PRIORITIES REVERSED

Editor:

Your editorial on May 7, against the \$700 million pork project to benefit casinos by moving the CSX railroad, was excellent.

Years ago, I thought an elected official going to Washington should have three priorities: No. 1, do what was best for the country as a whole; No. 2, do what he could for his own state; No. 3, let his personal desires and needs come last.

I have learned that this is not true. Those priorities are exactly reversed. When a politician leaves home for

Washington, he makes sure that ethics and principles are not part of his baggage.

This \$700 million will only be a drop in the bucket. Look at a map. How much more will it take to relocate the Louisiana part of the railroad? Do our politicians lie awake nights, worrying about the huge debt they are piling up?

During the last 40-50 years I have seen enough corrupt politics to realize that an honest man will never succeed in American politics. Due to the apathy of the people, we now have the government we deserve.

Of moneyed interests, by moneyed interests, for moneyed interests — there are over 15,000 such pork projects in the appropriation bills of 2005. One of these days, the Good Lord is going to get fed up with our monkey business down here, and pull the plug!

James L. Wray
Eupora

CONTACT SENATORS

Editor:

I was sad to see the editorial about the CSX rail line purchase. Enclosed you will find the letters I have written to Senators Lott and Cochran. I will encourage others also to contact them:

I would request that you vote against the CSX rail line purchase that is currently before Congress. To purchase a rail line that has just recently been rebuilt, for the economic benefit of the casinos, is wrong. Even if this purchase would enhance Mississippi economically, it does not justify spending \$700,000,000 in order to do so. This is a poor use of taxpayer dollars. Where would Congress get this money?

I have always voted for you, but I am strongly considering voting for someone else on June 6. Please reconsider your position on this matter.

Thank you for keeping us informed. I appreciate your editorials and the work you do.

Kitty King
Slayden

INEXCUSABLE

Editor:

Thanks for your editorial of April 27 (Hold the Applause). Had you not pulled the curtain back, most of us would never have known of the deplorable leadership of Bob Reccord, former president of North American Mission Board. Giving contracts to personal friends without getting competitive bids is inexcusable and certainly not sound or honest business practices. I am sure Reccord knew this.

I felt a sense of outrage and anger about him taking a trip to London to see a movie on NAMB funds in the amount of \$3771.64. The report cited other flagrant wastes of money. This type of mismanagement cannot be blown off by casually calling it "mistakes."

I belong to a small, rural Baptist church. We are mission-oriented and we struggle and sacrifice to give and we do very well considering our numbers and resources. To find our money so carelessly and callously used is rather disappointing, to say the least. It should not have taken nine years for the members of the board of trustees to stop this deplorable mismanagement. Maybe a closer look at them would be in order.

The cause of Christ and Baptist people deserve better.

Haskel Stringer
Bay Springs

WHERE WAS STORY?

Editor:

In regard to the story on the resignation of Bob Reccord, president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), I would like to raise two other issues. The first question is not whether he resigned in "disgrace," which seems self-evident, but why did Baptist Press not bring us this story? If it had not been for the Christian Index (the Georgia Baptist paper), the Associated Baptist Press, and our own Baptist Record, Mississippi Baptists would have never learned of any of this. One of the roles of the press — even in the denominational family — is that of a watch dog. BP seems to be more of a house pet.

Secondly, who is really leading our agencies: the trustee boards duly elected by the convention, or a closed group of powerful pastors? Apparently, before Reccord could make a decision about whether or not to resign, he needed the consent of this self-selected group of pastors from across the country, who for the past 30 years have pretty much decided for us who our leaders should be.

The board of trustees at NAMB should decide the direction and future of the agency for whose care they are entrusted. We don't need a self-appointed Baptist college of cardinals.

Carl M. White, senior pastor
Highland Church, Meridian

SOLUTIONS NEEDED

Editor:

We Baptists need to be careful in exploiting the abortion debate for our own standing. As the need to find solutions grows more critical, we are dangerously close to being part of the problem. Is abortion wrong? The great majority of non-Christians agree on this, so we should stop exalting ourselves like the Pharisee in Luke 18.

Baptists are in a unique position to change the tone of the abortion debate. Our leaders must lead for God's purpose and not for themselves. If we focus on saving the unsaved through the demon-

stration of Christ's love and forgiveness, we will contribute so much more to ending the practice of abortion.

Will we ever be able to stop abortions entirely? No more than we can stop ourselves from sinning. Christians sin. Many Christians and many Baptists have made the difficult choice to have an abortion and they have to live with that painful choice for the rest of their lives. The contentious spirit of much of our leadership does not fit a Christian heart. Many of us have become so vitriolic in this debate over abortion that we have chosen not to share the Good News with those who need it most, even those sitting in the pew right next to us.

The last thing any Baptist wants is our government or any government requiring a specific morality or behavior in any individual. It is the role of the church to show people they can live better, fuller lives through Jesus Christ.

David Dallas
Cleveland

ADJUST ATTITUDE

Editor:

Much has been written lately about our churches not identifying themselves as "Baptist." It seems to be widely, but quietly, agreed that the title Baptist is a hindrance to recruiting, but nothing I've read states how we have come to this questionable condition.

Consider the following explanation: our highly publicized civil war in which the conservatives took control of the Southern Baptist Convention from moderates sent the public a message that not everyone is welcome in our ranks.

In our gallant quest for biblical authority, we have inadvertently become known for what we are against rather than what we are for — not unlike the Pharisees of old. Our targets have included Mickey Mouse, public education, trick-or-treatin', Harry Potter, and wives who presume to have a vote in family matters.

Our grand traditions of congregational authority and priesthood of the believer are being compromised by local pastors who see themselves as spiritual dictators. Freedom of thought is taking a back seat to blind obedience.

Because of these misguided efforts, what was once America's greatest evangelical denomination has been tragically reduced to cult status in the eyes of much of the secular domain.

In an attempt to be constructive, may I suggest we adjust any condescending or judgmental attitude toward others to that of our Savior's posture eloquently penned in a song, "He looked beyond my fault and saw my need."

John H. Townsend
Memphis

FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Respond With Faith

Job 1:1-3, 8-11, 20-22; 2:7, 9-10

By Ginger M. Caughman

"I feel like Job." Have you ever made that statement?

Who among us has not opened our Bibles to the book of Job while experiencing earth's many problems? When and why have you read the book? Perhaps now the anguished cry of your heart and spirit is for a word from God. Job sought answers.

The Book of Job certainly poses a major question but its purpose is not only to address why good people suffer. Ponder with me the other purposes as we study through the book together this quarter. Let us pray for a fresh glimpse into God's purposes both to heal the hurts in our own lives and to be able to minister to others. Another purpose of our study is to see more of God's perspective. What can we do

"When Things Go Terribly Wrong?"

The first seven lessons of our study theme are taken from selected passages in Job that indicate actions we can all take. This first lesson is from the prologue of Job and focuses on Job's initial response of faith to his tragic losses.

Acknowledging Earth's Perspective, Job 1:1-3

Job was a real person who was considered an important man because people saw his great wealth and observed his strong character. Job was "blameless, upright, feared God, and avoided evil." (Job 1:1) Our human observations are always limited and sometimes may be superficial. Remember the story of the choosing of Israel's King



Caughman

David. God looked on the heart. Job's example of faith has inspired through the centuries.

Honoring Heaven's Perspective, Job 1:8

Satan is the enemy of God and the opponent of every Christian. This verse clearly shows that God honored Job when

He described Job as His servant, a man of exceptional character and strong faith.

Experiencing Faith's Challenge, Job 1:9-11

Job experienced the loss of his property and children (Job 1:13-19). God allowed Satan to test Job for His own good reasons. God reveals to us what we need to know. God's ways are often mysterious to us for His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9). But God ... But God! God is always good, loving, just, and wise. Terrible adversity can challenge our faith in God. Elizabeth Elliott has written "God is Good!"

Giving Faith's Response, Job 1:20-22; 2:7, 9-10

When Job heard of all the destruction and the loss of his family, he tore his robe, shaved his head, and bowed to worship God. (Job 1:20-22). "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." (v. 21).

In Satan's second test of Job, God allowed an attack on Job's personal health but God warned Satan not to kill Job (2:1-6). When a horrible disease fell on Job, he refused to blame or question God. Even his wife tried to get him to curse God and die. But Job was faithful. (Job 2:7-10).

Praise God for Job's example to us in Scripture. Job maintained his faith in God even after experiencing the loss of his wealth, his children, and his health.

Elizabeth Elliot: Modern Faith — Raised by missionary parents, Elisabeth Elliot Gren was born in Brussels and went to Wheaton College where she studied Greek and mission work. She spent a year in Ecuador where she married Jim Elliot whom she had met at Wheaton. Jim and four friends made contact with

the Auca tribe (now called Waorani) before they were all speared to death in 1956. These words of Elisabeth Elliot are a testimony of her Christian faith and the grace of God. "When a shortwave radio message told me that my husband and four friends were missing in the jungle, the word of Isaiah 43 came to me almost as if spoken aloud. I had memorized the words years before: 'Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God.' These old words came with a power and an insistence that convinced me they came from God, and with them came the faith to believe they were true."

Christians can respond with faith in troubled times.

Caughman is a member of First Church, Magee.

his. Caleb fought battles and endured the wilderness in order to claim the promise of God. This is a mark of enduring faith, waiting and wandering with full assurance that God will deliver what he has promised.

In Joshua 14:10-14, Caleb at last receives his inheritance. The long awaited promise from God has come. Throughout his life, Caleb had remained faithful and even at the age of 85, God was still working in and through him. Notice however, that there were still battles to be fought in order to claim his blessing.

Caleb's faith was based on the promises of God. It can certainly be said that he finished strong. The same faith that was willing to claim the promise of God 45 years earlier, remained strong and steadfast until the end. Enduring faith, finishes strong and we, like Caleb, can have that kind of enduring faith as we claim the promises of God in our lives.

Colvin is Minister of Education/Administrator at First Church, McComb.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Caleb: Faith Endures

Numbers 13:30, 14:6-9, Joshua 14:6-14

By Les Colvin

If most of us are honest, we can recall countless times when we have started a project or hobby only to let it go by the wayside after a short period of time. I have started hundreds of diets on Monday morning only to give up by Tuesday. We can all go through the attic or garage and find that half-completed crocheted afghan or wood-working project. We like to start things. Starting new projects and adventures can be exciting. However, it's not just starting that counts. It is also important to finish. Half completed projects, diets, etc. are of little value.

The same is true with our faith. We all can recall when we came to know Christ as our Savior. That of course is the most important decision we

will ever make. However, our Christian life and our faith are not just about how we started, but also how we will finish. Adrian Rogers once said, "A faith that fizzles at the finish was flawed from the first." The question we need to ask, is not just when I was saved, but what has happened since then? How is God working in and through me now?

We are familiar with the story of Moses sending the twelve spies to explore the Promise Land before the Israelites crossed over. As the spies came back, the majority reported that the land was flowing with milk and honey, but also filled with powerful giants and fortified cities. They were afraid to cross over and possess the land.



Colvin

Only Joshua and Caleb reported that the land should be taken. In Numbers 13:30, Caleb urges Moses and the people to "go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." Joshua and Caleb saw the same land as the others. However, the difference is in "how" they saw the land. They saw it through eyes of "faith."

What kind of faith did Caleb have to be so confident that they should take the land? First of all, his was a faith that saw the possibilities, not just the dangers. In Numbers 14:7, he said it was "an extremely good land." The blessings that awaited them were far greater than the dangers that existed. Caleb's faith was also one that took risks. The giants were real and the dangers were evident; however, Caleb chose to trust God in spite of the dangers. Real faith is that which is willing to step out into the unknown. It is only in the unknown and uncertain areas of our lives that

our faith can be exercised. It takes no faith when we have all of the answers. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "Faith is the evidence of things not seen."

In Numbers 14:9, two obstacles to faith in God are mentioned. The first is sin. Failing to trust God is sin. Hebrews 11:6 tells us "without faith, it is impossible to please God." The second obstacle to faith is fear. Paul told Timothy that "God did not give us a spirit of fear...." (2 Timothy 1:7). Failing to trust God and fear kept the Israelites out of the Promise Land and kept them from the blessings God had for them.

After forty-five years of wandering, God allows the Israelites to finally take possession of the land. Caleb is now 85 years old. In Joshua 14:6-9, Caleb asks for the promise that God had given him through Moses years before (Numbers 14:24). Caleb's faith was one that was willing to wait on God for the promise. He had received the promise when Moses gave it to him forty-five years before. Now he was claiming the promise that was already

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

Record

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts

are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit.

All news items are subject to editing,

and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

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Speakers Tournament champion implores, 'Take up cross'

Editor's note: Following is the first-place speech delivered by Carrie Kirk, a member of Ridgecrest Church, Madison, and senior at Madison Central High School in Madison, for the 2006 Speakers Tournament held April 8 at First Church, Clinton.



Kirk

Come Fathers and Mothers. Join me, youth of this nation, in taking up your cross. This is all you have to do. Take up your cross and follow Jesus daily. What does "taking up your cross" actually mean? What does it require of me? Is it just going to church every Sunday and Wednesday night and abiding by a set of rules, or is there something more?

I am in seventh grade, and it is my first church retreat. Some of you know this story. It is a late

Saturday night, the lights are dimmed, and the band plays soft music as you are invited to the altar to commit your life to Christ. I had never had a worship experience like this in my entire life, so there, that night, I say, "yes," to my Jesus Christ. I thought I understood the whole idea of following Jesus and taking up my cross, but I never realized that there was so much more than just saying "yes." No one ever explained to me that I was called to live my entire life for Christ. I thought having faith in Jesus as my Savior was the faith God cried out for, but I never realized God desired the faith in me to give everything, every aspect of my life to a man I, then, knew so little about.

Year after year I continued to live my life. I went to church every Sunday and Wednesday. I went on all the retreats I could, and I even did a devotional every night. What more could Jesus want from me? Every church retreat I attended was the same. There, I could hear Jesus knocking on my little door, so I would unlock it, open the door, and give Jesus a big hug for inviting me inside His world. I would gladly accept His love, but as He held my hand and led me into His life of no going to parties, no spending all of my time with friends who are not good influences, no more gossiping, and no more degrading movies and television shows, I would grab hold of the doorframe and refuse to go any further on the path with Jesus. Max Derree states that in the end it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are. As I

continued refusing to change my ways and to surrender my life, I was rejecting the opportunity to become the young woman God created me to be. For years I would hold tight to Jesus' hand while living the life this world told me I should be living. I was living my life by the Christian rules, but I was not living my life for Christ. Now that I look back, I realize how scared I was of sacrifice, because I had tried it many times, but I turned right back to the world when it began to hurt.

This is how I see it. First Jesus asks for our hearts, and until we give Him our hearts, we do not realize how we have filled it with the world. Once we willingly give Him our hearts, the first thing He does is breaks it open. Ouch! Jesus breaks our hearts? Yes. He carefully, with love, opens our hearts and pulls out everything for which have been living. He takes the world out of, and it hurts. Amy Carmichael asks, "Can we follow the Savior far, who have no wound or scar?" We must allow God to break us and take the world out of us no matter how much it hurts.

Once we begin to ask Jesus for strength and encouragement, the strength that nothing in this world could ever give us, He begins to fill our hearts back up. You know the living water that people say Jesus is? This is it! He pours and pours and pours His love out for us until we are overflowing with life. Until I fully surrendered and allowed Jesus to fulfill my heart, I never understood the meaning of taking up my cross.

So we are back to the cross again. What is my cross? My cross is one of the most precious gifts God has ever provided me with — life! My cross is my life, and my Creator, alone, knows how to fulfill my life. I took a long time to think and pray about what the cross represents, and God showed me I Corinthians 1:18 that says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." To non-believers the cross is simply a symbol of death; it is the transformation from physical life to

physical death. On the contrary, a believer sees the cross as a symbol of life! Galatians 2:19-20 says, "I have been nailed to the cross with Christ. I have died, but Christ lives in me. And I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me." By giving our lives to God and allowing our old sinful ways to be crucified on the cross with Christ, we take part in the beautiful transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life! John Stott says, "Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us." We must choose to give our every breath to God. We must take up our cross with joy knowing that Jesus will lead the way. Matthew 16:24-25 states, "Then Jesus said to His disciples: If any of you want to be my followers, You must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find it."

Gallup poll: Americans believe moral climate is sinking fast

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — More than eight in 10 Americans say the country's moral values are getting worse, although Democrats and Republicans differ greatly on what specifically is morally acceptable and what is morally wrong, a new Gallup poll shows.

The 81% of adults who say the nation's "state of moral values" is getting worse is a record high for the question, which was first asked in 2002. It registered at 67% in each of the first two years and 77% in 2004 and 2005 before inching even higher this year.

Only 11% of Americans say the nation's moral values are getting better.

The 10-point spike between May 2003 and May 2004 (when the polls were conducted) came during a time in which homosexual marriage was legalized in Massachusetts and several Canadian provinces. Janet Jackson was exposed on nationwide television during the Super Bowl, and the story broke about abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

The increase in pessimism about morality since 2002-03 is seen most among Republicans (a 16-point increase) and independents (an 18-point jump) and less among Democrats (a 6-point jump).

On another question, in describing the situation "right now" in America, 85% of Americans rate the "state of

moral values" as fair or poor. Forty-two percent say they are poor, 43% fair. All of those stats are new highs. Only 14% of Americans (a new low) say the state of morality is excellent or good.

Republicans and Democrats differ widely on what is and is not morally permissible:

- 51% of all Americans say homosexual relations are "morally wrong" and 44% say it is "morally acceptable." Democrats are much more likely to say homosexual relations are OK — 53% say it is morally permissible, while only 36% of Republicans say the same.

- 43% of Americans say abortion is acceptable; 44% say it's wrong. (the first time since 2001 that the percentage of "morally wrong" answers fell below 50%) Fifty-three percent of Democrats say abortion is OK, although only 30% of Republicans say so.

- 71% of adults say the death penalty is morally acceptable, although Democrats (63%) and Republicans (82%) disagree somewhat on its permissibility.

- 61% of Americans say embryonic stem cell research is OK. (The question did not note that the embryos are destroyed, a fact that pro-lifers say can

change a poll's outcome.) Sixty-nine percent of Democrats say it's morally acceptable, while 53% of Republicans say the same.

Following is the complete list of issues included in the poll, the percentage of people who say something is morally permissible and the numbers for both Democrats and Republicans:

- Death penalty (71% of all Americans say it's morally acceptable; Democrats, 63%; Republicans, 82%).

- Divorce (67%; Democrats, 71%; Republicans, 59%).

- Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur (62%; Democrats, 55%; Republicans, 75%).

- Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos (61%; Democrats, 69%; Republicans, 53%).

- Medical testing on animals (61%; Democrats, 56%; Republicans, 69%).

- Gambling (60%; Democrats, 65%; Republicans, 54%).

- Sex between an unmarried man and woman (59%; Democrats, 65%; Republicans, 50%).

- Having a baby outside of marriage (51%; Democrats, 57%; Republicans, 43%).

- Doctor-assisted suicide (50%; Democrats, 53%; Republicans, 45%).

- Homosexual relations (44%; Democrats, 53%; Republicans, 36%).

- Abortion (43%; Democrats, 53%; Republicans, 30%).

- Cloning animals (29%; Democrats, 28%; Republicans, 31%).

- Suicide (15%; Democrats, 18%; Republicans, 12%).

- Cloning humans (eight percent; Democrats, eight percent; Republicans, eight percent).

- Polygamy, when one husband has more than one wife at the same time (five percent; Democrats, four percent; Republicans, five percent).

- Married men and women having an affair (four percent; Democrats, five percent; Republicans, three percent).

The poll of 1,002 adults was conducted May 8-11 and is part of Gallup's annual Values and Beliefs survey.

